

Prof. David Robbins, Ph.D., thesis opponent

B.A. thesis evaluation

Marie Gemrichova

Violence, Guilt and Punishment in Selected Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne

Thesis director: Pavla Vesela, Ph.D.

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There are a number of problems, more or less severe, in Ms. Gemrichova's thesis. Among these are:

- 1) A more or less complete misunderstanding of what Hawthorne means when he calls any of his works a "romance." The particular indication of this misunderstanding appears on page 51. The material that could have begun to rectify this misconception was to be found in the Preface by the Author in *The House of the Seven Gables*.
- 2) The analysis of *Fanshawe* is relatively banal and superficial, as a direct consequence, I believe, of the choice of a relatively banal and superficial text, a piece of juvenilia disowned by Hawthorne himself. Why *Fanshawe* and not *The Blithedale Romance*, a much more important and valuable text?
- 3) Which leads me to question whether, as Ms. Gemrichova (and others) maintain, Guilt and Punishment are, in fact, Hawthorne's major themes. In *Blithedale*, for example, there is no real question of guilt, or any sense of a means adequately to apportion it, if the question were to arise. This absence in *Blithedale* necessarily calls Hawthorne's preoccupation with guilt in his other works into question. It also provides a possible answer to the question of why Ms. Gemrichova chose to concentrate on *Fanshawe* and not on *Blithedale*, with the resulting shortcomings.
- 4) If guilt is the principal *Leitmotif* of Hawthorne's *oeuvre*, then I am surprised that the issue of Original Sin as source for guilt never comes up in a thesis that at least brushes up against Hawthorne's complicated relations to Puritanism.
- 5) In repeated locations throughout the thesis (pp. 14-15, 59, *passim*.), Ms. Gemrichova refers to the author as the source of punishment for various characters, to the author as judge, to certain characters as the author's favorites, etc. From my perspective, this is a very problematical road to go down. In textual analysis, it is generally more effective to regard the fate of the various personages as flowing from their character and/or their circumstances, not from a *deus ex machina* intervention by the author.
- 6) While Ms. Gemrichova's treatment of the characters in *The Scarlet Letter* is relatively good, her understanding of the larger social/political/cultural context of the narrative is less adequate.
- 7) The narrator (not the author) is the speaker in the preface to *The Scarlet Letter* (The Custom House), while the speaker in the Preface by the Author in *The House of the Seven Gables* is clearly not the narrator, but the author. Ms. Gemrichova's confusion on this issue on page 42 (and elsewhere) opens up the very serious issue (not fully grasped by Ms. Gemrichova, it seems) that the narrator and the author should never be assumed to be the same voice/character.
- 8) The general analysis of themes and characters in *The House of the Seven Gables* is much weaker and more problematical than those in *The Scarlet Letter*— and particularly weak on Holgrave, who is a very major character, not a marginal one.
- 9) In the case of *The House of the Seven Gables*, Ms. Gemrichova fails almost entirely to see the larger, global political/social/cultural context implications regarding the position of aristocratic/plutocratic "houses" like that of the Pyncheons for a democratic U.S. culture, and *vice-versa*.

With all of this said, it should be remembered that the work under consideration is a bachelor's thesis, a learning tool. In that undertaking, Ms. Gemrichova has clearly produced some excellent, if often misguided, effort, despite a disappointing outcome.

On that basis, I believe that, overall, the work deserves to be judged a "2, velmi dobre."

Thesis evaluation: "2, velmi dobre."

Signed:

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If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at drobbins22@netzero.net.